

Course Syllabus
REL. 4370 (African Religions)

Fall 2014

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Course Description

What are the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of peoples of African descent? In what forms did they exist before slavery, colonialism and the arrival of Islam and Christianity in Africa? In what sense/s are Christianity and Islam in Africa African Religions? In what forms do African religious Expressions exist in modern times in Africa and the African Diaspora communities? This very intriguing course exposes students to the indigenous [African] foundations of the religious beliefs and practices of African communities living in Africa and the Diaspora. The course explores the theological ideas and the ritual forms especially of the Ashanti, Ga, Fon, Ewe, Ibo, Yoruba and Mende of West Africa, and the peoples of central, east and southern Africa. Because most of the Africans forced to migrate to the USA, and Caribbean and Latin America as slaves came from these regions this course will provide students with insights into the beliefs and practices of such African centered Caribbean and Latino religious traditions as Santeria [the lukumi tradition], Vodou, Candomble and some religious forms and expressions of African Americans in the USA. Topics to be covered in this course will include, sources of African Religious beliefs, African theological notions about God, African Religious beliefs about the nature of the human being and the universe, Witchcraft, sorcery and the problem of Evil in African religious thought and practice, Sin and salvation in African religious thought, Illness health and healing discourses and practices in African Religions, African Islam and African Christianity.

Class attendance and participation

10% percent of your final grade depends on your regular attendance and participation in Class discussion.

All must attend class regularly and punctually. Only three unexcused absences will go without penalty. Any additional unexcused Absence will cause a drop in your final grade. A to an A-, an A- to a B+, etc. Habitual lateness will also impact your grade negatively. If you cannot come to class, let the professor know beforehand via e-mail and explain why. Note: Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class

REQUIRED TEXT BOOK

The required text book for this course is
African Religions: A very short Introduction. By Jacob K Olupona
Oxford University Press 2014

Discussions and lectures will be based on readings from this text and selected readings from a variety of other relevant texts. These selections will be posted on Black Board ahead of the discussions and lectures.

WEEKS AND TOPICS

Week 1-Course introduction
Week 2-General Characteristics of African Religions
Week 3&4- Sources of African Religious beliefs and practices
Week 5-African Concepts of the Universe
Week 6&7-The spiritual Universe and its members
Week 8-Rituals----Life cycle Rituals
Week 9-Death and Rituals
Week 10&11-Concepts of health, illness,
Healing discourses and practices
Week 12-Salvation
Week 13-Sin and its removal
Week 14-Evil in African Religions
Week 15-African Islam and African Christianity

Expectations

You are all expected to come to class prepared to contribute to discussions on the assigned reading material, and to submit all assignments by their due dates.

Assignments and Evaluation

Attendance and Class Participation: (10%)

Term Paper (30%)

Two exams (50%) (25% each)

Book review (10%)

The term paper: Each student must choose an issue in which he Or she has keen interest. This must be on an aspect of African Religions in Africa, the USA, and the Caribbean or Latin American world. The date for the submission of the term paper will be announced in class. The following rules must guide you in the writing of this paper

Your paper should be between 5-8 pages [double space] in length minus references and a bibliography.

Draw on at least 4 good sources; [some can be primary sources]

Be analytical, that is, show evidence of your ability to use relevant analytical Tools in the exploration of the issue

Choose a topic you can manage, that is, one that is not too broad and can be researched easily

Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism is defined as the deliberate use and appropriation of another author's work without any indication of the source, and the representation of such work as the student's own. Students who do not give credit for ideas, expressions or other materials taken from others sources, including sources from the internet have plagiarized. A student will score zero if his or her work is found to be plagiarized. The student may also face disciplinary action for such academic misconduct.

Midterm Exam (25%)

The midterm exam will be an online multiple choice exam.

Final Exam (25%)

The final exam will also be an online multiple choice exam.

Exam dates will be announced in Class

Book Review: A four page review of the text: African Religions: A very short Introduction. By Jacob K Olupona
Oxford University Press 2014